DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 728 FL 010 890

AUTHOR Harber, Jean R.
TITLE Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black English.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 24p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Black Dialects; Blacks; *Black Students; English; *Language Attitudes; Language Variation; *Nonstandard Dialects; Questionnaires; Sociolinguistics; Standard Spoken Usage; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

This study focused on one of the suggested causes of the poor academic performance evident among many black, lower socioeconomic status children, namely teachers' attitudes toward Black English. There is considerable empirical evidence to suggest that speakers of Black English are evaluated as inferior to speakers of Standard English by their teachers. Furthermore, research findings indicate that teacher expectancy influences children's achievement. Thus, the opinions teachers form of students on the basis of their non-standard speech patterns may be, in part, responsible for the poor academic achievement evident among many black children in our schools. The results of a survey in which undergraduate education majors were asked to anonymously respond to statements about Black English are reported. The findings are discussed in terms of changes in teacher education which appear necessary in order to better prepare teachers for their role of working with nonstandard English-speaking students. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED181728

Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black English

Jean R. Harber

Assistant Professor

Department of Special Education

University of Maryland

College Park, Maryland 20742

301-454-2118

FL010890

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jean Harber

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Prospective Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black English

Although many causes of the poor academic performance of many black, lower socioeconomic status (SES) children have been suggested (e.g., dialect interference, the use of culturally and/or linguistically biased assessment instruments and procedures, irrelevant curriculum materials and instructional methods, teachers' attitudes toward nonstandard English, nonstandard English-speaking children's attitudes toward standard English), a review of the literature indicates no consensus as to the cause of and therefore the appropriate treatment for this serious educational problem. This study has focused on one suggested cause -- teachers' attitudes toward nonstandard English.

It is well recognized that important judgments are made about a person on the basis of his or her speech style (Petty & Starkey, 1967; Seligman, Tucker, & Lambert, 1972; Strang, 1968). Furthermore, there is empirical evidence which indicates that nonstandard dialects are perceived negatively and mark the user as inferior to members of other groups (Bickley, 1972; Blodgett & Cooper, 1973; Crowl & MacGinite, 1974; Guskin, 1970; Harms, 1961; Putnam & O'Hern, 1960; Woodworth & Salzer, 1971; McCormic-Peistrup, Note 5). Nonstandard dialects refer to regional-cultural dialects identified by the phonological morphological, syntactic, and semantic features which they do not share with standard English. The most widespread use of nonstandard dialect among the school-age population in the United States is Black English (Dale, 1976). Black English is the primary dialect of most, but not all, black individuals (Carroll & Feigenbaum, 1967; DeStefano, 1973; Dillard, 1972; Labov, 1967). Black English differs substantially from, but is linguistically as highly structured and rule-governed as standard English (Goodman & Buck, 1973; Labov, 1967; Stewart, 1969; Stodolsky & Lasser, 1967; Valletutti, 1971; Baratz & Povich, Note 1).

Several studies have been reported in the literature which examined teachers' perceptions of nonstandard dialects. Woodworth and Salzer (1971) asked urban and suburban elementary school teachers to rate reports which had been read onto audio tape by Black and white sixth graders. White children's reports were consistently rated superior to black children's reports, although the content of the reports was identical. Furthermore, urban teachers tended to rank all reports higher than suburban teachers. Woodworth and Salzer (1971) concluded that teachers "identified the black child's voice with his racial background and they associated such a background with negative achievement expectations" (p. 171). According to the authors, the black students read the Standard English stimulus materials as written; they did not alter the syntax, substitute dialect lexical variants, or deviate substantially from conventional pronunciations of words. Therefore, the authors concluded that the teachers picked up sufficient paralinguistic clues (e.g., intonation patterns) to identify the race of the child. In a similar study, Crowl and MacGinitie (1974) audio taped black and white ninth grade boys speaking identically worded answers to typical school questions. They presented the recorded answers to 62 white experienced teachers and found that the teachers assigned significantly higher grades to the answers when spoken by white students than when spoken by black students. Teachers who were most susceptible to vocal stereotyping could not be differentiated on the basis of sex, age, number of years of teaching experience, most frequently taught grade, or percentage of black students most frequently taught.

Granger, Mathews, Quay, and Verner (1977) investigated teacher judgments of functionally equivalent speech samples obtained from middle- and lower-SES black and white children. They found that middle-SES children were rated more positively than lower-SES children and white children were rated more positively

than black children by their sample of preschool and primary-grade teachers. Their results suggest that the teachers were attending less to what a child said than to how he or she said it. Thus, there is evidence that teachers are not totally objective in their evaluations of children's performance but are influenced by the speech patterns of children. This finding suggests that teachers should be trained to develop an understanding of the fact that their attitudes toward a child's speech may hamper their ability to evaluate the child objectively. As Granger et al. (1977) stated, teacher training programs should include training teachers to look beyond a child's speech patterns in evaluating his or her ability and/or performance.

Blodgett and Cooper (1973) administered a questionnaire on attitudes toward Black English to 134 white and 65 black elementary school teachers in Alabama. Analysis of the results indicated that 53% of the white teachers and 26% of the black teachers viewed Black English-speaking children as less intelligent than Standard English-speaking children. Sixty-five percent of the white teachers and six percent of the black teachers indicated that they had difficulty understanding the speech of Black English-speaking children. Fifty-eight percent of the black teachers and 61% of the white teachers felt that the school should provide special speech and language instruction for Black English-speaking children. When the teachers who indicated that they had attempted to eliminate dialect from the speech of children in their classes (45% of white teachers and 48% of black teachers so indicated) were asked whether they had been at all successful in eliminating dialect, 17% of the white teachers and 44% of the black teachers indicated success. Seventy-nine percent of the white teachers and 36% of the black teachers felt that reading, spelling, and composition seem to be more difficult for Black English-speaking than for Standard English-speaking children. When

asked whether they felt that Black English-speaking children can make satisfactory progress in school without changing their speech, 50% of the black teachers and 55% of the white teachers answered affirmatively.

McCormick-Peistrup (Note 5) observed that there was a great variation in the way first grade teachers graded Black children's use of dialect during reading instruction and found that this variation was associated with differences in reading achievement. Bickley (1972) attempted to identify the attitudes teachers formed toward students who have phonologically or morphosyntactically divergent elements in their speech. She asked 60 practicing and 60 prospective teachers to listen to and rate passages presented on audio tape which contained morphosyntactical or phonological divergent elements. She found that morphosyntactical elements were more powerful in evoking negative attitudes toward speakers than were phonological elements.

Teachers' rating did not vary with amount of teaching experience. The dialect heard on the tapes was Appalachian dialect, a dialect spoken by many white "mountain" people in Appalachia which differs from Standard English in phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features. In a study which focused on teachers' attitudes toward Black English, Jongsma (1975) found that practicing teachers recognized a larger percentage of morphological features of the dialect than phonological features. Jongsma also reported that her sample of teachers had "mildly positive" attitudes toward Black English speakers.

In summary, there is considerable evidence to suggest that speakers of nonstandard English dialects in general and speakers of Black English specifically are evaluated as inferior to speakers of Standard English by their teachers. Furthermore, the findings of Bickley (1972) suggest that

morphosyntactical features are more powerful in evoking negative attitudes in teachers than are phonological features of nonstandard dialects.

Teacher expectancy has been found to influence children's achievement (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) and, specifically, culturally different children's achievement (Buford, 1973; Henderson & Long, 1973; Miller, 1973; Newland, 1974; Rist, 1972). Thus, the opinions teachers form of students on the basis of their nonstandard speech patterns may be, in part, responsible for the poor academic achievement evident among many black children in our schools (Rist, 1970).

In the past several years much effort has been made through pre-service training, in-service training, and the educational media to alert current and prospective teachers to sociolinguistic factors known about Black English. The study reported here attempted to determine attitudes of prospective teachers toward Black English. As suggested by DiGiulio (1973), a determination of teacher attitudes would indicate areas of knowledge and lack of knowledge with regard to the language of many black students and might assist in the planning of teacher education programs.

Method

Prospective teachers' attitudes toward Black English were studied. A pencil and paper questionnaire which dealt with currently held beliefs and controversial issues concerning Black English was utilized to determine attitudes.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were undergraduate education majors in their last fall semester of course work before student teaching. Approximately 400 questionnaires were mailed and subjects were asked to return the completed

questionnaires using the self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided within two weeks. The response rate was 60%.

Construction of the questionnaire

Stimulus statements were designed to elicit attitudes toward Black English and speakers of Black English, and the need for educational intervention and/or modification. Responses were restricted to a four-point Likert-type scale to which subjects respond with degrees of agreement or disagreement (i.e., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). Instructions requested that respondents gave their truthful opinion to the stimulus statements and anonymity was assured.

Results

As indicated in Table 1, more than one-half of the respondents indicated that oral reading (statement[S] 2) spelling (S 5) and composition (S 16) seem to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children. Furthermore, almost one-half of the respondents indicated that reading comprehension (S 12) seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children. However, only 13.7% of the respondents indicated that arithmetic (S 9) seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children. Furthermore, these findings were similar for both black and white respondents.

- -

Insert Table 1 about here

- -

Slightly more than one third of the respondents indicated that speakers of Black English generally have difficulty following spoken directions in a

classroom situation (S 1). The response to this item did differ by race of respondent; only 14% of the black respondents agreed with this statement while more than 35% of the white respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. More than 40% of the respondents indicated that they have difficulty understanding the speech of Black English-speaking children (S 15). Again differences by race of respondent were apparent; no black respondents indicated agreement with this statement while close to half of the white respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents indicated that it is very difficult to change a child's speech patterns (S 10) and an equal percentage of respondents indicated that Black English should be allowed in the classroom, at least during the elementary grades (S 3). Slightly more than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that it is necessary for all students to have mastered Standard English before completing their schooling (S 7). Slightly more than ont-half of the respondents indicated that teachers should correct children who do not use Standard English pronunciations (S 13) and almost two-thirds of the respondents indicated that teachers should correct children who do not use Standard English grammatical and syntactic forms (S 8). There was little difference by race of respondent except that a greater percentage of the white respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the S 8 than S 13, while the reverse was true for the black respondents.

Most respondents (85%) indicated the need for the development of culturally relevant curriculum materials for use with black children (S 11) and almost three-quarters of the respondents disagreed with the statement that there is no need to develop and use special instructional materials in teaching beginning reading to Black English-speaking children (S 6). The black respondents indicated somewhat stronger opinions to these statements than the white respondents.

Seventy-four percent of the white respondents and 100% of the black respondents indicated that many currently used tests are biased against Black English-speaking children (S 14). One-third of the respondents indicated that Black English-speaking children cannot make satisfactory progress in school without changing their speech patterns (S 4); a higher percentage of black respondents agreed with S 4 than white respondents.

Table 1

Percent Responding to Stimulus Statements

Stimulus Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
1. Speakers of Black English generally have difficulty following spoken directions in a classroom situation.	3.4	30.9	46.1	17.9	1.7
2. Oral reading seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children.	9.1	51.2	29.4	5.6	4.7
3. Black English should be allowed in the classroom, at least during the elementary grades.	19.4	46.4	21.9	5.4	2.9
4. Black English-speaking children cannot makd satisfactory progress in school without changing their speech patterns.	0.4	32.3	53.1	11.1	3.1
5. Spelling seems to be no more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children.	3.6	43.4	40.8	5.4	6.8
6. There is no need to develop and use special instructional materials in teaching beginning reading to Black English-speaking children.	5.0	21.7	54.3	15.8	3.2

Table 1 (cont.)

Stimulus Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
7. It is necessary for all students to have mastered Standard English before completing their schooling.	19.2	51.1	22.4	4.1	3.2
8. Teachers should correct children who do not use Standard English grammatical and syntactic forms.	9.2	55.3	27.2	6.9	1.4
9. Arithmetic seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children.	0.0	13.7	58.8	14.2	13.3
10. It is very difficult to change a child's speech patterns.	11.6	52.5	27.4	5.8	2.7
11. Culturally relevant curriculum materials should be developed for use with Black children.	26.9	57.8	11.7	2.3	1.3
12. Reading comprehension seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children.	4.6	43.4	38.4	6.8	6.8
13. Teachers should correct children who do not use Standard English pronunciations.	5.8	51.1	34.2	6.2	2.7
14. Many currently used tests are biased against Black English-speaking children.	26.8	47.4	18.6	3.6	3.6

Table 1 (cont.)

Stimulus Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion
15. I have difficulty understanding the speech of Black English-speaking children.	4.5	37.1	46.8	8.0	3.6
16. Composition seems to be more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children.	3.6	48.9	35.4	4.0	8.1

The results of this study were somewhat similar to the findings reported elsewhere (Blodgett & Cooper, 1973; DiGiulio, 1973). Overall, subjects in this study were slightly more positive in their attitudes toward Black English which may be a result of changes in pre-service teacher training or merely a result of sampling bias. That a greater percentage of respondents overall indicated that teachers should correct children who do not use Standard English grammatical and syntactical forms than children who do not use Standard English pronunciations is consonant with the findings of Bickley (1972) which indicated that morphosyntactical features are more powerful in evoking negative attitudes in teachers than are phonological features of nonstandard dialects.

Discussion

Perhaps the single most important implication of the results of this study is that there is a need for additional training of teachers with respect to dealing with Black English speakers in the classroom. The method or methods used to provide this for teachers needs to be explored. Recently Blumenthal (1976) studied the feasibility of instruction in Black English through the use of audio lesson tapes. She found that after the training education majors were more accepting of Black English primers than a control group. However, no significant differences emerged between the two groups in attitudes toward Black English or in comprehension of Black English. Just how to best provide training in dealing with Black English speakers clearly needs further study.

That more than one-half of the respondents indicated that language subjects are more difficult for Black English-speaking children than for Standard English-speaking children suggests that educators and researchers should continue their search for better ways of teaching the language subjects to Black English-speaking children. Responses indicating the need for culturally relevant curriculum materials and special instructional materials for teaching beginning reading serve to reinforce the need for modification of educational practices. Furthermore, the respondents' perceptions that many currently used tests are biased against Black English-Speaking children again indicates the need for modifications of educational procedures.

Reference Notes

1. Baratz, J. C., & Povich, E. A. Grammatical constructions in the language of the Negro pre-school child. American Speech and Hearing Association Paper, 1967.

2. Harber, J. R. The effect of accepting dialect renderings of extent materials on Black English-speaking children's oral reading scores. Manuscript submitted for publication, 1976.

3. Harber, J. R. Reading and the Black child: A review. Manuscript submitted for publication, 1977.

4. Lefevre, C. A. The nature and history of Black English with special attention to the teaching of reading. Unpublished manuscript, Temple University, 1974.

5. McCormick-Peistrup, A. Black dialect interference and accommodation of reading instruction in first grade. Berkeley: Language behavior research laboratory, University of California, 1973.

References

Bickley, R. T. A study of teacher attitudes toward divergent speech patterns (Doctoral dissertation, University of Georgia, 1971). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1972, 32, 5081 A. (University Microfilms No. 72-10, 916).

Blodgett, E. G., & Cooper, E. B. Attitudes of elementary teachers toward black dialect. Journal of Communication Disorders, 1973, 6, 123-133.

Blumenthal, M. Effectiveness of training educators in nonstandard English linguistic patterns (Doctoral dissertation, Hofstra University, 1975). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1976, 36, 5753B-5754B. (University Microfilms No. 76-6153).

Buford, B. I. Teacher expectancy of the culturally different student subgroups in Texas in relation to student achievement (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A & M University, 1973). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1973, 34, 1158A-1159A. (University Microfilms No. 73-21, 646).

Carroll, W. S., & Feigenbaum, I. Teaching a second dialect and some implications for TESOL. TESOL Quarterly, 1967, 1, 31-40.

Carter, T. P. Cultural content for linguistically different learners. Elementary English, 1971, 48, 162-175.

Crowl, T. K. & MacGinitie, W. H. The influence of students' speech characteristics on teachers' evaluations of oral answers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1974, 66, 304-308.

Dale, P. S. Language and development: Structure and function (2nd ed.). New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1976.

DeStefano, J. S. Black English. In J.S. DeStefano (Ed.), Language society, and education: A profile of Black English. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1973.

DiGiulio, R. C. Measuring teacher attitudes toward Black English: A pilot project. Florida FL Reporter, 1973, 11, 25-26, 49.

Dillard, J. L. Black English: Its history and usage in the United States. New York: Random House, 1972.

Figurel, J. A. Language patterns of the disadvantaged beginning reader. In J. A. Figurel (Ed.), Reading and realism. Newark,Delaware: International Reading Association, 1969.

Foster, H. L. Ribbin', jivin', and playin' the dozens: The unrecognized dilemma of inner city schools. Cambridge, MASS: Ballinger Publishing, 1974.

Goodman, K. S. & Buck, C. Dialect barriers to reading comprehension revisited. Reading Teacher, 1973, 27, 6-12.

Granger, R. C., Mathews, M., Quay, L. C., & Verner, R. Teacher judgments of nonstandard speaking children. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, April, 1977.

Guskin, J. Social perception of language variations: Black dialect and expectations of ability. Paper presented at the American Research Association Conference, Minneapolis, March, 1970.

Harber, J. R., & Bryen, D. M. Black English and the Task of Reading, Review of Educational Research, 1976, 46.

Harms, L. S. Listener judgements of status cues in speech. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1961, 47, 164-168.

Henderson, E. H., & Long, B. H. Academic expectancies of black and white teachers for black and white first graders. Proceedings of the 81st Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, Canada, 1973, 8, 687-688.

Houston, S. H. Black English. Psychology Today, 1973, 6 (10), 45-48.

Hunt, B. C. Black dialect and third and fourth graders' performance on the Cray Oral Reading Test. Reading Research Quarterly, 1975, 10, 103-123.

Jongsma, K. S. The relationship between third- and fourth-grade female teachers' knowledge of and attitudes toward language spoken by Black English speakers (Doctoral dissertation, University of New Orleans, 1974). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1975, 35, 5217A-5218A. (University Microfilms No. 75-4796).

Labov, W. Some sources of reading problems for Negro speakers of nonstandard English. In A. Frazier (Ed.), New directions in elementary English. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967.

Labov, W. The logic of nonstandard English. The Florida FL Reporter, 1969, 7, 60-74, 169.

Labov, W. Academic ignorance and Black intelligence. The Atlantic Monthly, 1972, 229(6), 59-67.

Miller, H. L. Race vs. class in teachers' expectations. Psychological Reports, 1973, 32, 105-106.

Newland, T. E. Testing minority group children. In G. J. Williams, & S. Gordon, (Eds.), Clinical child psychology: Current practices and future perspectives. New York: Behavioral Publications, 1974.

Petty, W. T., & Starkey, R. J. Oral language and personal and social development. In W. T., Petty (Ed.), Research in oral language. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of Education, 1967.

Putnam, G. N., & O'Hern, E. M. The status significance of an isolated urban dialect. Language Dissertation, No. 53, Language, 1960, 31(4), Whole of Part 2.

Rist, A. Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-falling prophecy in ghetto education. Harvard Educational Review, 1970, 40, 411-451.

Rist, R. C. The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. In J. M. Hunt (Ed.), Human intelligence. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1972.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. Pygmalion in the classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968.

Seligman, C. R., Tucker, G. R., & Lambert, W. E. The effects of speech style and other attributes on teachers' attitudes toward pupils. Language in Society, 1972, 1, 131-142.

Stewart, W. A. On the use of Negro dialect in the teaching of reading. In J.C. Baratz, & R.W. Shuy (Eds.), Teaching Black children to read. Washington,, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969.

Stodlosky, S. & Lesser, G. Learning patterns in the disadvantaged. Harvard Educational Review, 1967, 37, 546-593.

Stout, R. T., Guthrie, J., Kleindorfer, G.B., Levin, H.M. Schools and inequality: Them that has, gets. In M. P. Douglass (Ed.) Claremont Reading Conference, Thirty-Fourth Yearbook (Reading and School Life). Claremont, California: The Claremont Reading Conference, 1970.

Strang, R. Developing oral expression. In W. T. Petty (Ed.), Issues and problems in the elementary language arts: A book of readings. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1968.

Torrey, J. W. Illiteracy in the ghetto. Harvard Educational Review. 1970, 40, 253-259.

Vallettuti, P. Language of the mildly mentally retarded: Cognitive deficit or cultural difference? Exceptional Children, 1971, 37, 455-459.

Weber, R. Some reservations on the significance of dialect in the acquisition of reading. In J. A. Figurel (Ed.), Reading goals for the disadvantaged. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1970.

Woodworth, W. D. & Salzer, R. T. Black children's speech and teachers' evaluations. Urban Education, 1971, 6, 167-173.

JH/js
6/3/77